

I continued school with a home teacher provided by the school district. In those days students with a disability were not encouraged to attend regular classes. There were some differences in the courses offered to me, too, although it might have been just a peculiarity of my teachers. Course requirements included "Senior Problems," a mixture of things that included a mild form of sex education called "Family Life." My teacher said of Family Life, "We can skip this if you want. I'm sure you know it anyway, and you'll probably never need it." I was too polite to tell him he was showing his ignorance about people with disabilities. He probably thought, like many people do, that if a person is disabled they lose any interest in sexual matters. The funny thing is, another course requirement was driver education. Although it was very unlikely that I would ever have the upper body strength to drive, he still made me take the textbook part of driver education. He probably felt more comfortable teaching me how to drive than he did talking about sex.

I know I benefited academically by having a home teacher, but my social life surely suffered. My neighborhood friends would come over occasionally, and I was invited to a few parties, but not very often. I was, however, getting very good grades. I had always gotten good grades in Reading, English, Art, and Social Studies, but only acceptable in Math. I still struggled with Algebra, but Geometry and Trigonometry were a snap. And having a teacher on a one-to-one basis meant I couldn't fake it. If I was having a problem with a certain subject the teacher knew it immediately. Overall, it was probably good for me. But I missed taking science lab courses and mixing with the other students.

I already mentioned my lack of an outside social life. This was compounded by the social rituals of the time. In the 1950s it was the young man's responsibility to provide for transportation and to pay for meals and entertainment. I didn't drive, and I had very little income of my own. And, not attending school meant I knew very few girls my age.

I probably had a pretty low physical self image, too. I was well liked and felt at ease with individuals or in small groups, but I was uncomfortable in many situations. This was especially true when I was around girls whom I had known before I contracted polio. I remember once when Jeannette Roulon came to our door soliciting donations or selling something. I had a severe crush on Jeannette in the seventh grade. My mother knew her and invited her in. I was mortified. I was lying on the couch in pajama bottoms and a t-shirt. I must have looked like an animated, half dressed skeleton. It least that's how I felt. We exchanged a few words and she left. I sensed that Jeannette was just as embarrassed as I was. I was angry with my mother for not giving me some warning, and I pledged to myself that I would never be caught in that situation again. From the time I got out of bed in the morning until the time I went to bed at night I was fully dressed. I wore my leg braces, long pants, and a long sleeve shirt.

There is a stereotype of a teenager looking into a mirror and saying, "I can't go out tonight. I've got this great big zit on my face." They think that everyone is going to be staring at their pimple. I was seldom troubled by acne, but walking with braces and having limited use of my upper extremities I sometimes felt that everyone in the room was watching me. It took many, many years for me to overcome this.

While I was in the tenth grade the school district made a decision that home students would not be able to take a full course load. Whatever their reasoning, and I did not agree with it, this meant that I would not graduate until 1959. One benefit to this, however, was that I got to graduate with the first graduating class from the newly built Earl Warren High School, now called just Warren High School. I had never actually been on campus, except for a basketball

game, but a few days before the graduation ceremony I attended a school assembly. I was recognized for academic achievement by the California Scholastic Federation.



Several months after graduating from high school the California Department of Rehabilitation asked me to take a series of scholastic and aptitude tests. These were designed to evaluate my employment potential and direct any future academic pursuits. I was surprised that I did so well. I say I was surprised, because I'd always had the nagging feeling that my home teachers were fudging a little on my grades. The thought crossed my mind, more than once, that I was getting very good grades because the teachers felt sorry for me. The lady giving these tests said that I scored in the upper 25 percent of college freshman, overall, and in the upper 10 percent when compared to engineering students. My I.Q. was 131, well into the superior range. It took a while before I really believed this. I think the lady sensed my disbelief, because she gave me a copy of her written report, saying she didn't usually do this.

Because I graduated from high school with honors, and because I had done well on these scholastic and aptitude tests, I was urged to consider college. I did consider it, but I had many internal conflicts to resolve. Schools in the 1950s, including colleges, didn't encourage attendance by students with my degree of disability. This was slowly changing, but many obstacles remained. Although I could walk, and climb most stairs, I had trouble opening doors. And I couldn't take notes very well so college lectures would be a problem. Even getting back and forth to classes would be very difficult.

I also had a real fear of catching a respiratory infection. It seemed that two or three times a year my brother Robert would come home from college with a cold or sore throat. I am no more susceptible to colds than the next person, but if I do get one it is almost always difficult for me. A cold usually puts me out of commission for a week or two. This was a psychological barrier that I found hard to overcome.

The third reason was probably a bit selfish. I enjoyed the trips I took with my parents. If I enrolled in college full time, I would not be able to participate in these. And, knowing my parents, they would probably curtail their traveling to help me. I think I would have enjoyed most aspects of college life but I'm not sorry I made the choice I did. In the late fifties and early sixties, I took several college level courses through UCLA Extension. Not for credit, but for my own enjoyment. I took several units of History and a number of science courses, including Physics, Geology, Biology, Physiology, and Psychology. I've done this on an occasional basis ever since. I've enjoyed these academic challenges and they have given me insights into the world around me. Still, it would be nice to have a college diploma to hang on the wall.